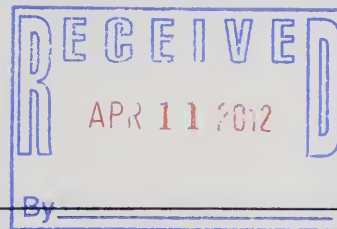


Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



RECORD OF DECISION
CITY OF TALLAHASSEE SOUTHWESTERN TRANSMISSION LINE
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
APALACHICOLA NATIONAL FOREST
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA

DECISION

Based on my review of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), I have decided to implement Alternative 1 as described in the FEIS which will authorize a special use permit to the City for the operation and maintenance of a 230-kV transmission line on the ANF. The route will be approximately 8.75 miles long and would require a 60-foot-wide permanent ROW. The entire 8.75-mile ROW would be co-located with existing utilities, allowing for overlap in the ROW. Seven of the 8.75 miles would be located within the 60-foot-wide temporary work space which was previously cleared of forested vegetation during improvement work on the existing 80-foot-wide FGT ROW in 2010. Of the 7 miles of the Alternative 1 ROW co-located with the FGT ROW, 6.48 miles is located within the ANF.

The Alternative 1 route would begin at a tap point along the existing Line 31 utilizing a new tap station near Bice Road (Forest Road 317), in the vicinity of the intersection of Springhill Road (County Road 2203) and Bice Road. From the proposed tap station, the Alternative 1 route would continue east, primarily co-located along the south side of the existing FGT natural gas pipeline corridor through the ANF for approximately 6.48 miles.

Approximately 3 miles east of the proposed tap station, the Alternative 1 route would cross an existing City 115kV transmission line. The proposed line would proceed east crossing Crawfordville Highway (US 319) and Wakulla Springs Road (State Road [SR] 61). Almost immediately to the east of Wakulla Springs Road, the Alternative 1 route would cross Munson Slough.

Continuing along the co-located corridor approximately 5 miles east of the proposed tap station, the Alternative 1 route would cross another existing City 115kV transmission line and would continue east, crossing the Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail and Woodville Highway (SR 363).

Approximately 0.5 mile east of Woodville Highway, after crossing a third existing City 115kV transmission line, the route would turn northwest and would continue north co-located along the east side of this existing transmission corridor for approximately 1.75 miles before terminating at the existing Substation BP-5 south of Capital Circle SE.

Approximately 7 miles of the east-west portion of the Alternative 1 route would be co-located along the existing FGT pipeline corridor; 6.48 miles of which would be within the ANF.

Under Alternative 1, a tap station will be located within the ANF. The design for the tap station would have two breakers west of Bice Road and one breaker east of Bice Road. The proposed design would require an additional 100-foot-wide ROW (9,000 square feet) to connect the tap station to power line structures. The proposed tap station equipment will occupy approximately 0.33 acre and require approximately 3 acres for construction.

BACKGROUND

The City of Tallahassee proposed this project to meet projected future electric transmission demands and to maintain system reliability in compliance with North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) Reliability Standards. The NERC was authorized under the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to ensure the reliability of the North American bulk power system. The NERC is certified by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to develop and enforce reliability standards for the bulk power system.

Additionally, the NERC assesses adequacy annually via a 10-year forecast, and summer and winter forecasts; monitors the bulk power system; and educates, trains, and certifies industry personnel (NERC 2011).

The Proposed Action is needed to ensure that the City continues to operate the transmission system within applicable limits consistent with the requirements of the referenced Transmission Planning and Transmission Operating Standards. City planning studies indicate that system improvements must be implemented by December 2012 in order to maintain compliance with NERC Reliability Standards.

Failure to comply with these standards could lead to diminished reliability of the City's transmission system and mandatory fines or penalties from the NERC. The Proposed Action would provide enhanced system benefits that would meet the NERC-mandated requirements and would improve overall system performance and reliability of service to City utility customers.

DECISION RATIONALE

My decision to select the proposed action is based on its potential to provide public benefits consistent with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield of forest resources. On the National Forests in Florida, these concepts are expressed through the goals described in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

The environmentally preferable alternative is the one which would cause the least impact to the biological and physical environment. The No Action alternative would not authorize the construction of the electric transmission line within the existing Florida Gas Transmission pipeline corridor and, therefore, would involve the least amount of human-induced change to the environment on National Forest System lands.

Although the selected alternative has a greater effect on the environment, I have decided to issue the special-use permit because it would provide greater net public benefits.

- The selected alternative will create the least new disturbance to the environment either on the National Forest.
- The selected alternative includes 128 specific mitigation measures to reduce environmental and social impacts.
- The selected alternative will help resolve uncertainty surrounding impacts to the striped newt by requiring the City of Tallahassee to fund a monitoring project to evaluate whether the power line poses a barrier to movement in amphibian populations. This information will help the Forest Service respond to this species needs in future projects. In addition, the City of Tallahassee will contribute funding to habitat restoration work previously authorized under the 2009 Gopher Tortoise Habitat Improvement EA which will directly improve habitat around ponds needed by the striped newt.
- The selected alternative includes a mitigation to offset the 50 acres permanent widening of the FGT temporary workspace by acquiring key lands of similar ecotypes from the City of Tallahassee.
- The selected alternative benefits the community through more reliable electric service.
- The selected alternative meets the objective of current Forest Service energy policy which states "The use and occupancy of Federal lands, including National Forest System (NFS) lands, is an important element in facilitating the exploration, development, and transmission of affordable and reliable energy to meet these National Energy Policy goals. This should be an important consideration when responding to proposals for the siting of energy and energy related facilities on NFS lands."
- The selected alternative best meets the purpose and need for action by providing reliable energy transmission while reducing impacts to the environment and local communities. Other alternative routes on NFS lands would result in disturbance to heritage and visual resources as well as result in new disturbance of forested lands.
- The selected alternative addresses the two significant issues by requiring the City of Tallahassee to fund monitoring of amphibian impacts and avoiding impacts to private land owners who might be impacted if the permit were denied and the City of Tallahassee pursued construction off-forest.

The FEIS for the Proposed City of Tallahassee Southwestern Transmission Line, documents the analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

On October 7, 2010, the USFS mailed letters to various government agencies, landowners within 0.25 mile of the alternative routes, tribal entities, and the current ANF mailing list of concerned citizens who have expressed interest in Forest Service projects to inform them of the opening of

the formal scoping period, methods of providing comments, and the scoping meeting date, time, and location. Following scoping and meetings with the USFS, an additional off-Forest Service property route (Alternative 3) was identified. On March 31, 2011, the USFS prepared and mailed a new letter to all landowners within 0.25 mile of the new route, agencies, and other interested individuals and organizations soliciting comment on Alternative 3.

A notice of intent to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on Thursday, October 14, 2010 (75 FR 63141). In addition, the proposed action was listed in the National Forests in Florida Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the environmental analysis. The FEIS lists agencies, organizations, and people who received copies in table 7-4.1.

In addition to publication of the NOI in the *Federal Register*, the City provided the following efforts to ensure that the public remained informed about the proposed project. The project was listed on the USFS Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in October 2010.

The City issued a press release on October 22, 2010, announcing the date, time, location, and purpose of the scoping meeting. The City placed a notification describing the project in the *Tallahassee Democrat* "Local" section on October 23, 2010.

The City developed a project Web site to provide the public with details about the public scoping meeting and general project information, including a discussion of the need for the project, the project background, and its potential routes: <http://www.talgov.com/YOU/electric/swtline.cfm>. The City's Web site was updated concurrent with the mailing of the March 31, 2011, letters soliciting comment on the off-Forest Service property route alternative to reflect this new information.

Additionally, the USFS provided the scoping letter on its Web site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida/apalachicola/resources/projects.php>. The USFS's Web site was also updated concurrent with the mailing of the March 31, 2011, letters soliciting comment on the off-Forest Service property alternative to reflect this new information.

A draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) was published for review and comment on December 23, 2011 and identified in the Federal Register Volume 76, Number 247. A legal notice of availability was published in the *Tallahassee Democrat* on December 28, 2011.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two other alternatives in detail, which are discussed below. In addition, three other alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study because of likely impacts. The No Action Alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in the FEIS in section 2.5.

No Action Alternative- The No Action Alternative considers the environmental impacts if the proposed project or its alternatives were not built. Evaluation of the No Action Alternative is a

requirement of NEPA and its associated implementing regulations (40 CFR 1502.14[d]) to allow federal decision-makers (in this case, the USFS) to compare the impacts of the proposed project and its alternatives with the impacts of not approving the project. The Forest Service only has authority to authorize an SUP for the construction and maintenance of the proposed transmission line on National Forest System Lands. Not authorizing the SUP would not prohibit the City from constructing the transmission line off of National Forest System Lands.

Consideration of the No Action Alternative in the FEIS compares the impacts should the City of Tallahassee decide not to construct a transmission line off of National Forest System Lands. Under the No Action Alternative, the electrical transmission system proposed to connect Line 31 to the existing Substation BP-5 would not be constructed. Proposed improvements to the City's transmission system are necessary in order for the City to continue its operation within applicable limits consistent with the requirements of NERC Reliability Standards. Without the proposed system improvements, City planning assessments indicate that the existing lines forming the southern delivery path could exceed their applicable limits (thermal, voltage, IROLs, and/or SOLs) as a result of contingencies impacting the northern delivery path. Further, a USFS decision approving the No Action Alternative would result in the City being in non-compliance with NERC Reliability Standards, resulting in potential fines and penalties.

Off-Forest Alternative – This alternative is a potential route off National Forest System Lands which the City could choose to evaluate if the Special Use Permit is not authorized by the USFS. This alternative was considered as a hypothetical alternative to compare and contrast the potential impacts of denying the Special Use Permit. The route would be 12.65 miles in length, and would connect Line 31 with the existing Substation BP-5. It would be co-located within existing road and utility ROW for approximately 55% of the route. This alternative route would connect to Line 31 in northern Wakulla County with a proposed tap point immediately north of the dead-end of Crestwood Lane adjacent to Line 31 (Figures 2-4 and 2-6). From this tap station, the line would run east for 0.6 mile, crossing over Crawfordville Highway (US 319) then turning north to co-locate along the east side of Crawfordville Highway. The line would run north along the east side of Crawfordville Highway for 1.05 miles before turning east along the Leon-Wakulla County line. This portion of the alternative would traverse portions of the River Sinks parcel of the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the 1999 National Forests in Florida Land and Resource Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with direction relevant to this action.

In compliance with the Endangered Species Act, a Biological Assessment was prepared and the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the findings.

In compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, a heritage resource survey was conducted and required concurrence was received by the State Historic Preservation Office and potentially affected tribes.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. Individuals or organizations that submitted comments during the Notice and Comment period may appeal.

A written appeal must meet content requirements described in 36 CFR 215.14. Appeals must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record (*Tallahassee Democrat*).

Appeals must be filed with the Regional Forester for the Southern Region at:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer
1720 Peachtree Road, NW, Suite 811N
Atlanta, GA 30309-9102

Appeals may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401 or mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., closed on federal holidays.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeal is filed, this decision may be implemented no sooner than five business days following the 45 day appeal period that begins the day after publication of my decision. If an appeal is filed, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition. If you would like additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact:

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Harold Shenk, 57 Taff Drive, Crawfordville, FL 32327, phone (850) 926-3561.



SUSAN JEHEBER-MATTHEWS

Forest Supervisor

3-16-12

Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.